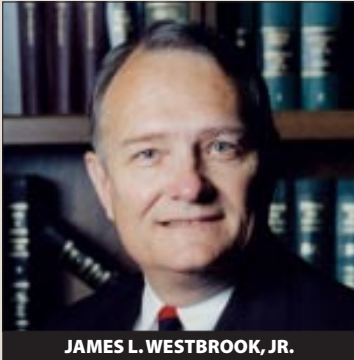


## In-Service Training Award in Memory of Clarence E. Ridley



JAMES L. WESTBROOK, JR.

ICMA's In-Service Training Award is presented to the administrator or administrators who have developed and implemented highly effective in-service training programs for local government employees. This award was established in memory of Clarence E. Ridley, a pioneer in the field of local government management. This year, ICMA presents the In-Service Training Award to James L. Westbrook, Jr., city manager of Asheville, North Carolina.

As communities and their organizations become increasingly culturally diverse, it is imperative that governmental workforces be prepared to meet the changing needs and demands of their constituency. Recognizing that a local government's success today depends on its ability to change, City Manager James Westbrook formed a task force to reinvent the professional development process in the city of Asheville, North Carolina (pop. 69,000).

The professional development task force was charged with devel-

oping a way to systematically provide organizational training and staff development for city employees. The group initially conducted an internal survey to determine needs and important issues within the organization. The findings revealed that front-line supervisors and mid-level managers felt unprepared to enforce city policies when they became supervisors and managers. A separate external benchmarking study that involved 13 other North Carolina cities indicated that the quality of service provided to citizens also should be improved.

The task force recommended that the city focus on becoming a learning organization, skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, as well as modifying behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight. The Corporate University was developed to serve as an organizational umbrella for the training and development of the city's 1,000 full- and part-time employees.

Through the Corporate University, Asheville provides ongoing training to mid-level managers and front-line supervisors and prepares employees for promotion. The university's curriculum was developed to address the management, ethics, and leadership skills deficiencies of internal candidates and to ensure that the city's employees were qualified to compete for professional positions.

Asheville's Corporate University comprises three progressive phases that focus on developing managerial and leadership skills. Department directors are required to complete several programs in an advanced curriculum designed specifically for their needs. Each class is tailored to accommodate participants' work assignments and general work environment. The city also has incorporated a "train the trainer" approach whereby selected employees train other employees.

Mr. Westbrook and then Assistant City Manager Stephen Douglas Spell developed the first class of the curriculum on leadership and ethics, and the former continues to teach the course and look for ways to improve the city's new professional development program. Among his accomplishments is a partnership with Western Carolina University (WCU) that encourages municipal employees to further their education through the use of transfer credits, a local government fellowship program, and a tuition reimbursement program, currently funded at \$35,000. Additionally, the MPA program at WCU holds classes in Asheville's municipal buildings, further promoting educational opportunities for city staff.

Although only two years old, Asheville's professional development initiatives have successfully provided many benefits to city employees. To date, 100 of the city's 280 managers and supervisors have graduated from the city's Corporate University. Some of these employees have become top candidates for promotions, and 18 supervisors and mid-level managers have successfully competed for higher level positions within the city. More than a dozen city employees are currently enrolled in WCU's MPA program.

The city's customized training approach works! New supervisors report that the training enables them to better carry out their responsibilities and enforce city policies, thus helping to decrease the number of formal grievances from 33 to 7 annually. As a result, the city's human resources staff has saved about 1,300 hours—or an estimated \$25,000. The city also credits the decrease in customer complaints to the facilitation and communication skills training employees received through the Corporate University. At just \$1,000 per year, the Corporate University may prove to be one of the most cost-effective investments Asheville has ever made. ♣